

Review

Michael Petrou: *Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-7748-1418-8.

Some two dozen German-Canadians were among the 1,700 Canadian volunteers fighting on the side of the democrats in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939. They fought as members of the International Brigades, which numbered 40,000 troops, who came from Hungary, Italy, Germany, Canada, the United States, and many other countries. On the battlefields, they fought not only against Franco's rebels, but also against some of the 16,000 German troops Hitler sent to support his fellow dictator (and to test his own military).

One of the German-Canadians was Frank Hadesbeck, who volunteered not out of political conviction but because he was out of work: "I didn't know what the word 'anti-fascist' meant at that particular time," he recounted in a CBC interview from 1965. The prospect of good pay and an opportunity "to better myself" seemed to him "a way out" (31). His apolitical attitude got him "in trouble" immediately after arriving in Spain, because he refused to hand over his passport (59). After a year of fighting in Spain, he and his comrades had become "just like a bunch of brothers in the end - because we had to" (48). At the end of the war, the Canadian government screened those wishing to return and rejected several of the more recent immigrants. "Frank Hadesbeck was saved," Petrou writes, "because he could describe the Calgary Stampede to a suspicious [official]" (103).

Petrou has written a fascinating account of Canada's "Renegades" who fought for democracy on the side of democratically elected Spanish government and its allies. His study is balanced, but also passionate: "For all their human faults," he writes, "and for all the ugly complexities in the war they chose to fight, the Canadians who fought in Spain had the moral clarity to face the rising menace of fascism when most of their countrymen chose to look away. They joined a war of which their government and the RCMP did not approve. It seems they were never quite forgiven" (180). The engaging narrative is accompanied by 51 photographs and a nearly complete list of all Canadian volunteers, often including their hometown, ethnicity, birth date, occupation, and war experience.

The Chair in German-Canadian Studies was established in 1989 with grants from the Secretary of State's Program for Canadian Ethnic Studies and a group of private philanthropists within the German-Canadian community of Winnipeg. It is located in, and affiliated with, the History Department at the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Chair promotes the teaching of, and research into the history and culture of German-speaking immigrants and their descendants in Canada. It interacts with the German-Canadian community in Winnipeg, Manitoba and the rest of Canada through public lectures and the newsletter. The Chair promotes regional, national and international research through conferences, publications and grants.

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Submissions of articles, news, reports, and reviews as well as artwork and photos for publication in this newsletter are welcome.



German-Canadian Studies

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German Emigration Fever Redux

"Do you have problems with your perception?! This place is too big for me. End of discussion!" truck driver Mirko Flagel (26) barks at his wife, Mandy Kasper (25). The German couple have just arrived in New Zealand to figure out whether they want to immigrate to this country 20,000 kilometers away from their small village in the east German land of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, near the Baltic Sea coast. Such is the stuff that makes for high drama on German television: the newest reality show about emigrants - "Der Auswanderer-Coach" (The Emigration Coach).

For several years now, the German cable television station Kabel 1 has inundated viewers with Auswanderer-reality shows like "My new life" and "My new life XXL" showing the trials and tribulations of German families emigrating to places around the world (see GCS Newsletter 12.2 December 2007). Viewers soon learn that many of these emigrants are fully unprepared for their mission: some have not even visited the countries they choose as their new homes; they do not speak the new language; they have got only a few thousands dollars of savings; they do not know anybody in their new hometown; they have no visa or work permit; they have no job and no housing. German emigrants' ignorance has brought grand drama into the homes of German television audiences.

TV producers who carefully craft this utter idiocy have now realized that they can make even more money by producing yet another show that further exploits the stupidities of prospective emigrants like Mirko and Mandy. In Germany, the couple has a two-year old son, two secure jobs as truck driver and nurse, an 1,800 square foot house that is fully paid, and a horse. They enjoy life in a small village and with their family and friends nearby. But they want to emigrate to New Zealand, a country they know only from postcards. They have never been on an air plane, hardly been outside of Germany, and speak very little English. Unless you want to pay actors, the greatest difficulty in producing such a show (one hopes) must be to find such a couple among Germany's emigrants.

Rather than simply following them on their quest for the holy grail in a new land, Kabel 1 now supplies them with an emigration coach to see whether they are fit to emigrate. You would think in Mandy and Mirko's case it is a forgone conclusion, but read on.

The coach is a 57-year-old bald man, Günter Lukas, who drives a silver Volkswagen. The manager has lived in different countries - which apparently qualifies him to be Germany's Number 1 emigration expert. Without twitching an eye, Lukas first exposes Mirko's and

Do you know the international phone code for Spain? What about Canada's gross domestic product? Can I play a European DVD on an American DVD player? If you know the answers to these questions, Kabel 1 declares you to be qualified to emigrate!

The two latest episodes of Auswanderer-Coach are about families wanting to emigrate to Canada. You can watch the shows online: http://www.kabeleins.de/doku_reportage/auswanderer_coach/videos

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Mandy's weak English skills on national television, and then arranges a "coming out" party for family and friends, where the couple tells their shocked and crying parents that they want to leave Germany.

On a good note, as Lukas explains, he presents the two with surprise tickets to Auckland, where they are supposed to test the waters by going through a rigorous test designed by the coach himself. On day one, they have to compare German grocery prices with those in an Auckland supermarket. They pass with flying colours. On day two, they are to find a small town in which they would want to live. They end up fighting,

because Mirko thinks the town of 6,000 is much too big. On day three, the coach has arranged job interviews, which both pass despite their marginal English skills. On day four, the coach sends them to a hamlet of 200 people where they decide they would want to live, because, as Mirko says, it is "most like home." On day five they return to Germany.

What does the coach conclude after his rigorous exam? Mirko and Mandy, he believes, will be well prepared to head off to New Zealand within a year - thus producing new material for the cable station's "My New Life". This is much needed, because interest in these shows has been declining. Indeed, Auswanderer-Coach was taken off the airwaves soon after it was first broadcast.

Germans in Ontario and Buenos Aires

Ben Bryce recently completed an MA thesis in German-Canadian Studies with the help of a German-Canadian Studies Research Scholarship from the Spletzer Family Foundation. Entitled "Germans in Ontario and Buenos Aires, 1905-1918: Das Berliner Journal and Das Argentinische Tageblatt's Discourse About Ethnicity and Its Changes During World War I" examined "how two German-language newspapers represented a significant portion of two German communities in Canada and Argentina."

Mr Bryce reported that he "analyzed how the papers discussed the presence of German ethnicity in their regions between 1905 and 1914 and how this discussion was affected by World War I. I mapped out how Das Berliner Journal from Berlin (Kitchener), Ontario and Das Argentinische Tageblatt from Buenos Aires also discussed related aspects such as dual loyalty, ethnic institutions, and linguistic and cultural persistence and illustrated how German ethnic identity changed in these two regions."

The "transnational comparison of ethnic Germans in the New World" showed differences between Germans in different

global settings and thus "illustrated the malleability of ethnicity. Being German had a different meaning in Berlin, Ontario in 1905, in Kitchener, Ontario in 1918, in Buenos Aires in 1905 and 1918, and in the German Empire." World War One sped up German-Canadians' assimilation while it united and strengthened Argentine's German community. Despite the differences, there were also transnational links through "global technology, economics, and immigration."

The research grant allowed Mr Bryce to access Das Argentinische Tageblatt and the Argentine census at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut in Berlin. He reports: "This research year has also been very helpful in preparing me for my doctoral studies, which I will begin this September at York University. I have greatly improved my German this year, and because I plan to continue with German-Canadian studies for my dissertation, it will be invaluable to have an academic level of written and spoken German." The funding also enabled Mr Bryce to give a paper at a conference at the University of Buenos Aires, to be published in the Argentine Germanists' annual publication later in fall 2008.

"High Above Them All:" German Researcher Investigates Mount Royal's History

Dr. Nadine Klopfer has written a dissertation about "space and social order in Montreal, 1880-1930." For a while she worked at the John-F.-Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Free University of Berlin and is now at the America Institute of Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich. In a recent interview, she explained her interest in and research on Canada.



Nadine Klopfer studies Montreal

GCS Newsletter: How does a German come to study Montreal?

Nadine Klopfer: Having studied North American History and Art History with a focus on architecture and urban planning, I have long been interested in the history of spaces, or rather: the spatiality of historical processes. In my PhD thesis, titled "High Above Them All," I therefore tried to combine this interest with my focus on 19th and early 20th-century Canadian history.

What does space have to do with society?

That was indeed one of the basic questions that guided my PhD research: How exactly did the relationship between society and space work? Or: What was the urban space's role in the negotiation of urban power relations? More precisely, I set out to analyse the complex interaction of physical urban space, the perceptions of this space by the citizens, the construction of identities, actual power relationships between these groups, and visions of the city's social order.

Why did you choose Montreal to find answers for your questions?

The City of Montreal in the decades between 1880 and 1930 seemed a perfect territory for such inquiries due to the complexity of its spatial and social situation in an era of rapid modernization and economic boom. In what way did the relationship between space and society play out in an industrializing commercial metropolis that was renowned for its complex social and cultural texture, its cohabitation of and multiple faultlines between elites and working classes, between anglophones and francophones, protestants and catholics, immigrants of all sorts?

Digging into the sources, I realized that Montreal's mountain, Mount Royal, had long been a symbolic spot for Montrealers. In the "imaginaire collectif de la ville" the mountain was widely considered an essential

element of the city's identity due to its visual distinctiveness and its historical importance for the early colonial settlement. Consequently, the power to define the character of that iconic site came to be viewed as an important symbolic factor in the competition for power in Montreal. It thus seemed to me the perfect place to grasp the interrelatedness of space and social/cultural power.

What did you find out?

I explored several regions of the mountain and the conflicts that took place in these spaces, showing how different groups of people struggled to possess Mount Royal not only

physically, but also discursively. Starting with what was frequently called the "back of the mountain" and the debates about a new campus for the Université de Montréal in the 1920s, I then moved to the "front" and the foundation of the Royal Victoria Hospital in the 1880s, and finally up the hill to the very summit with its hotly discussed plans to build a statue of the Virgin Mary (1888) and the erection of a cross in 1924.

Did any of your findings surprise you?

I was struck by the fragility and variability of Montreal citizens' coalitions and alliances. Their multiple situative loyalties and interests thus constitute the centerpiece of my dissertation, which draws a complex picture of Montreal society around 1900. Moreover, the complexity of the city building process was illuminated, with which sets of values and mental maps of the city's inhabitants interfered strongly.

What was your conclusion?

I concluded that the urban space was not only shaped by Montreal's citizens, but contributed enormously to their day to day group formations and identifications and resulting local political practice. It seems that due to the fluidity of spatial visions, the urban space was frequently the grounds on which compromises were negotiated. Thus the urban space turned out to play a key role in often peaceful coexistence in a fragmented city.

Dr. Klopfer's dissertation "High above them all: Raum und Gesellschaftsordnung in Montreal, 1880-1930" (LMU Munich 2008) received the Dissertationspreis der Gesellschaft für Stadtgeschichte und Urbanisierungsforschung 2008 and the Prix d'Excellence du Québec 2009.

